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ABSTRACT

The value of language and intellectual stimulation in young children is stressed in a report designed for health administrators and family planning organizations. First year developmental milestones are outlined, and a baby's need for attention as well as the need to provide information on speech and intellectual development to parents are discussed. The importance of play in a child's development is emphasized, and special problems of immigrant children and children of working mothers are surveyed. The need to detect handicaps early so that children have the best chance of developing to their full potential is considered. (PHR)

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September 1979

STIMULATION OF LANGUAGE AND INTELLIGENCE IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Document intended for health administrators and plamers-family organizations

PREPARATION FOR PARENTHOOD

Parenthood completely changes the life of parents. Many become parents without really realising this. With the rapid changes in society, where families are getting smaller, fewer young parents have helped to rear children themselves. Many have no first-hand experience of young babies. Young parents often live far away from their babies grandparents. For these reasons parents need more teaching in child care than ever before. This applies just as much to fathers as mothers.

The concept that parents can learn to stimulate their child's ability is often not appreciated.

Parent-craft education is a difficult subject to teach well. There is however much demand for such education which is often not adequately given in schools (60% of British sixteen-year-olds thought they had not been given enough teaching). There is an enormous sale of parent-craft magazines, books and audience for television programmes on the subject.

The review could be prepared thanks to a grant of the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, at the occasion of the International Year of the Child

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BABIES ARE NOT BORN EQUAL

Although the great majority of pregnancies are straightforward, some babies are unfortunate.

Babies are born with brains and bodies of varying quality and potential. Some of these qualities are inherited, some determined by parental conditions in the womb, certain drugs, excess alcohol, tobacco, lack of adequate ante-natal care and maternal stress and problems at delivery can all have a detrimental effect on the baby. Overall, the single most important factor in determining a baby's potential and its eventual fulfilment is the social condition of the parents. They influence child rearing practices and the ways in which the child is taught at home and how he responds at school.

It is no longer held that the eventual intelligence level of adults is entirely innate. Like physical growth it has needed a great deal of care to help it develop to the full.

Here are some data on psycho-motor development:

0 - 3 months	Crying brings relief from distress Eye to eye contact (2-3 weeks) Social smile (4-6 weeks) Responds with sounds (6 weeks onwards)
3 - 6 months	Responds to all friendly comers Makes loud sounds to himself Chuckles and laughs Shouts to attract attention (5 months)
6 -12 months	Becomes shy with strangers Babbles for self-amusement Imitates adult actions Responds to name Points and makes sounds to draw attention (Uses objects in a way that shows he understands what they are for)

A great deal of knowledge concerning child development and the influence of parental health and social factors has been derived from longitudinal studies which have followed the development of large numbers of infants from birth through their school years. Among those, the Cooperative Study on Child Growth and Development sponsored by the ICC is widely known.

BABIES NEED ATTENTION

They need close contact and interaction with the same adults.

Frequently changing adult helpers are not a good substitute, nor is the television unless the adults watches with the child and both react to it together.

WHAT CAN A BABY DO AT BIRTH ?

Many parents do not realise that their newborn baby can see, hear, taste, feel, experience comfort and pain.

From the moment of birth learning begins. It is a two-way process in which both mother and baby learn. The baby cries with discomfort and pleasure, the mother responds and the baby reacts, the mother responds again. Both reward each other. Professionals need to keep an eye open for when this is not happening. All new mothers and their infants need continuing support and ready sources of accurate professional advice.

LEARNING TO TALK

Hearing and seeing are associated with the development of speech. The baby and mother start to communicate with each other within moments of birth by facial gesture, smell and sound. The patterns of sounds and language the baby hears eventually become sorted out and understood. The baby babbling sounds eventually become formed as recognisable words. Babbling occurs in all babies of whatever origin. Even deaf children babble. For babble to lead to language the baby needs to be «bathed» in meaningful language addressed to him and associated with things he can see being done. The child whose deafness is not detected doesn't learn to speak because he does not hear language. Early detection of deafness is vital.

REASONS WHY INFORMATION ON STIMULATING INTELLIGENCE AND LANGUAGE IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IS NEEDED

Families are smaller and fewer teenagers today see young babies and toddlers brought up.

This had resulted in the level of practical experience of how children develop naturally falling.

Young parents move away from their home and the extended family.

Grandparents are likely to go out to work well past usual retiring ages. In all these ways the natural learning ground is being eroded.

Babies abilities at birth are often underestimated. New parents should be given a session in which their own babies abilities are demonstrated. Babies are designed «to be immature, their vision is so set that they can concentrate on close-up faces, not on open vistas».

Developmental danger signals must be acted on as early as possible. The mother may feel that the child is not seeing, hearing, moving or taking notice. This is very important and should never be ignored. She is usually right. Examination by a doctor may reveal delayed motor development, lack of normal alertness, visual and oral. Remember that a single examination may not be enough. Be prepared to see the child again.

Warning signals for parents in children's speech and hearing

by 6-8 weeks	Baby not responding to voices or everyday sound
by 3-4 months	Not showing interest in people and playthings
by 10 months	Not «babbling» repetitively to self and others (average for this 7-8 months)
by 21 months	Not speaking single word (average 13-15 months)
by 27 months	Not putting 2 or 3 words together in sentences (average 18-22 months)
by 4 years	Not using fully intelligible speech (average 3-3 1/2 years)

WHY ARE THE PRESCHOOL YEARS SO IMPORTANT ?

The range of skills and the speed with which they can be acquired in this period surpasses any other period of life.

The brain and skull develop faster than other parts of the body.

By the age of two years the brain has attained about 60% of its adult weight and by 6 years 90%. It is estimated that 50% of human skill and knowledge is gained between conception and 4 years and 80% by 8 years.

PLAY IS CHILD'S WORK

Good quiet babies may not be learning. All babies require PLAY. At first this is the semi-automatic response when the mother picks up, fondles and coos to her baby. The baby reacts to this by a series of responses which are interpreted by the mother; alertness, facial appearances, and by 4 - 6 weeks a smile. Once the baby can make purposeful movements active play begins - they respond to shapes, patterns, colours, rhythms. By five months they reach out to touch and grab. From then on the speed of normal development continually accelerates -

PLAY NEEDS - PLAY THINGS - PLAY SPACE - PLAY TIME - PLAY FELLOWS

LATER DEVELOPMENT OF PLAY

Toys are the tools of developing understanding. Their use extends motor development and manipulation skills, and helps them to understand the complex world around. Constructive play with objects shows that their use is understood; speech should soon follow.

Watching a child at play is a good way to study development

Providing a safe place to play and things to play with is essential

Older children need other children to play with, to learn to become sociable and co-operative human beings. This is one of the reasons why preschool group experience is so valuable, especially now that families are so small.

Books are vital. They are the key to all human knowledge. The child introduced to books in early life has a priceless advantage over other children.

Play is defined by Dr. Mary Sheridan as «The eager engagement in pleasurable physical or mental effort to obtain emotional satisfaction».

In cultures where baby and mother are always in close contact and touch, early baby toys are unecessary. In Western culture where complete bodily contact breaks at birth toy substitutes are necessary. Immigrant children may lack play things because they are not part of the family's culture, yet need them when they move to westernised cultures. Many parents and relatives buy needlessly expensive and fragile toys - they need positive advice. Toy libraries are as important as book libraries for the older child, yet are rarely available.

All children's hospitals should include play workers on their staff.

WORKING MOTHERS

Why do mothers work ?

Often she has to help provide for a family; without her contribution the family may be unable to exist at the normal level of present day society. Where this is the reason,there may be many other factors to take into account other than the separation by day of mother and child. Many mothers need to work for their own fulfilment. Home conditions here are different. Social class of parents still submerges most other differences.

Work outside the home which can be carried out without disrupting the needs of young children is one of the needs of many mothers. Few employers are aware of what is needed to combine the best needs of mother and child.

In some areas 25% of mothers of young children are on tranquilizers.

A depressed mother is a serious bar to a child's development.

In 1980, several technical reviews will be published within the framework of the ICC-HEW Project in child care,bringing additional information.

IMMIGRANT CHILDREN have double needs

They need to be educated for the society in which their family lives and they need to understand and live in their new culture. New cultures are often hostile to immigrants and the parents may never fully integrate. For these parents it is often best to hold fast to the ways that they know, yet they need help to gain the insight that their children's ways will be different. The child needs to master two systems and their languages. It is often best for the child to learn the family language first and only start the new national language when they are fluent in their native one. This is usually around 2 1/2 - 3 years. It is important however that they can communicate in and understand the language of school before they start.

Many immigrant husbands do not encourage wives to learn the language of their new country. This places them at a great disadvantage and thus may make them ineffective as parents. Language teaching to both parents is of paramount importance. It is best promoted by educated women of their own culture.

HANDICAPPED CHILDREN have continuing disabilities of body, intellect and personality likely to interfere with normal growth and development or capacity to learn.

3% of all newborn infants have a severe handicap and up to 10% a more minor defect.

For handicapped children to get the best chance of developing their full potential, they must have their problems diagnosed early, their parents given realistic advice, and a plan for education mapped out and started without delay. The family of the handicapped child need readily available sources of continuing approachable medical, educational and social advice.

The problems of handicapped children and of their social insertion will be the theme of technical reviews to be published in 1980-1981 within the frame of the ICC-HEW Project.

Handicapped children usually have multiple problems - it is wise practice to make repeated detailed assessments of all systems, particularly the special senses - vision and hearing.

So it is of handicap - some handicaps are obvious at birth, e.g. meningomyelocele.

- some have to be sought, e.g. phenylketonuria

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE

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INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S CENTRE AND TURKISH AND INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S CENTRE

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